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TAGS: [OVIPPREL](#) [MNUC](#) [KNNP](#) [AF](#) [RU](#) [IR](#)  
SUBJECT: Secretary Clinton's March 31, 2009 conversation  
with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov

Classified by: Paul Wohlers, Deputy Executive Secretary,  
S/ES, Department of State. Reason 1.4.(b,d)

[1](#)1. (U) March 31, 2009; 3:30 pm; The Hague, Netherlands.

[1](#)2. (U) Participants:

U.S.  
The Secretary  
SRAP Holbrooke  
A/S Fried  
Michael McFaul, Senior Director for Russia and Eurasia,  
NSC  
Howard Solomon, Office of Russian Affairs  
Rebecca Callaway (Embassy Notetaker)

Russia  
FM Sergei Lavrov  
D/FM Alexander Borodavkin  
Igor Neverov, Head of North America Department, MFA  
Evgeniy Ivanov, Head of Foreign Minister's Office  
Vladislav Maslennikov, Minister-Counselor, Russian  
Embassy

[1](#)3. (C) SUMMARY. On the margins of the March 31 Dutch-Afghan-U.N. Conference on Afghanistan in The Hague, the Secretary and Russian FM Lavrov discussed the upcoming meeting between President Obama and Russian President Medvedev, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Middle East Peace Process and the North Caucasus. The Secretary and Lavrov finalized the text of the joint presidential statement and agreed to a meeting in Washington in May, with a possible follow-up "2 plus 2" meeting in June before the Presidential Summit in Moscow in July. Lavrov was concerned that the joint statement might contain language that the Iranians perceive as a threat or accusation. On Afghanistan, Lavrov reiterated that the Government of Russia (GOR) would consider delisting former Taliban if there was a strong evidentiary package and expressed support for an OSCE election support mission in Afghanistan. Lavrov highlighted the need to harmonize U.S. and Russian actions towards Pakistan and pushed for a Moscow Conference on the Middle East Peace Process in July. END SUMMARY.

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U.S.-Russia Cooperation  
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[1](#)4. (C) The two leaders met on the margins of the March 31 Dutch-Afghan-U.N. conference on Afghanistan in The Hague ("International Conference on Afghanistan: A Comprehensive Strategy in a Regional Context"). The tone of the meeting was friendly. The Secretary and Lavrov expressed satisfaction with the joint

presidential statement and the statement on post-START negotiations. (Note: Both statements were released the following day during Presidents Obama and Medvedev's April 1 meeting. End Note.) Lavrov suggested that they work to finalize the U.S.-Russia Action Plan with the goal of announcing it during Lavrov's May 7 visit to Washington. They considered the possibility of a follow-on "2 plus 2" meeting in June before President Obama's visit to Moscow in July for a Presidential Summit. Lavrov mentioned that although there would be logistical difficulties (i.e. the state flights issue) if President Obama wanted to come to Moscow, those could be resolved.

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Iran  
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15. (S) Turning to the joint statement, the Secretary and Lavrov discussed how to express a shared concern

over the possibility of an Iranian nuclear weapons program without sending a signal to Iran that would either condone such a program or be perceived by the Iranians as a threat. Lavrov stressed that Russia does not want the statement to contradict the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which has not found evidence of an Iranian nuclear weapons program. Lavrov also indicated the need to be very particular about the text because it might be later adopted by either the U.N. Security Council or in a bi- or multi-lateral agreement. The Secretary and Lavrov agreed on language that recognizes Iran's right to a civilian nuclear program but underscores the concerns of the U.S. and Russia about an Iranian nuclear weapons program.

16. (S) In terms of the U.S.-Iranian relationship, Lavrov said that he "can welcome President Obama's message to the Iranian People." He said that he thinks there is a chance to "reset the U.S.-Iranian track," and that full U.S.-Iranian engagement may be possible. The opportunity is fragile, and if the April 1 joint presidential statement contains language that the Iranians perceive as a threat or accusation, the process could derail.

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Afghanistan-Pakistan  
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17. (C) On the Afghanistan conference, the Secretary and Lavrov both expressed appreciation for the other country's ideas and interventions. Lavrov added that he welcomed U.S. participation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's (SCO) special conference on Afghanistan, held March 27 in Moscow. Secretary Clinton said that the United States would especially appreciate Russian help with the U.N. 1267 committee and establishing a framework for delisting former Taliban members. Lavrov expressed support for delisting, but cautioned that specific procedures would need to be set out and that the person to be delisted must clearly show that he is no longer engaged in terrorist violence. Lavrov gave an example of a governor in Afghanistan whom the Dutch had asked Russia to delist. In that case, Russia was firm that the governor would not be delisted simply for political reasons -- there needed to be evidence that the governor was no longer an active member of the Taliban.

18. (C) Lavrov also raised the possibility of the OSCE doing an "assessment mission" in relation to the upcoming Afghan elections. The election support in 2004 by the OSCE had been outside its mandate, said Lavrov, as Afghanistan is not an OSCE member. Russia feels that a 2009 OSCE election support mission is enough, but an OSCE assessment would be problematic.

¶9. (C) On Pakistan, Lavrov mentioned that he had met with Pakistan's FM Qureshi. Russia and Pakistan are in close consultations and are interested in setting up bilateral or group meetings. Lavrov also highlighted the need to harmonize U.S. and Russian actions towards Pakistan. Secretary Clinton agreed that the U.S. and Russia should hold meetings on Pakistan, but that the U.S. Department of Defense may need to get involved if the meetings discussed the military. Lavrov indicated that the Russian Defense Ministry would not need to be involved, as there are no Russian troops on the ground, but said "let's be inventive."

¶10. (C) SRAP Holbrooke suggested changing text in the draft joint presidential statement to note that terrorist groups in Pakistan and Afghanistan are a common threat to the U.S. and Russia, and that the two countries agree to work together and support a coordinated response to that threat, with the U.N.

playing a key role. Lavrov agreed to the proposal, saying "We do have problems in our territory from those (groups)."

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Israel/MEPP  
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¶11. (C) Lavrov raised the Russian proposal to hold a Moscow Conference as a follow-on to the Annapolis Conference, noting that "the Arabs are pushing" for a conference. He added that the GOR is considering a July timeframe, and perhaps President Obama could be there to open the conference with President Medvedev. He claimed that the GOR has been talking to Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, who has reportedly said that he will come to Moscow for the conference. Lavrov thinks this is worth doing, but that the U.S. and Russia should be careful not to raise expectations too high. Russia wants to "let the steam out" and make the negotiations continue from where they stopped. The Secretary said that the idea was intriguing, but that the United States has not talked with either Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu or Lieberman yet. She said that she would bring up the idea informally with President Obama in London.

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USAID in the Caucasus  
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¶12. (C) Following up on their meeting in Geneva, Lavrov told the Secretary he had heard back from the "relevant agencies" on USAID's activities in the North Caucasus. He appreciates that USAID was working with the MFA to clarify its programs in the North Caucasus. He added that a joint U.S.-Russian visit to the region was planned, and said he welcomed a USAID presentation of its programs there. Secretary Clinton thought that this may be the best way to "avoid the thorny issues."

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Airport Delay/Adoption/Visas  
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¶13. (C) Lavrov acknowledged receiving the message from the American Embassy in Moscow about delays (of Russian NGO head Migranyan) at JFK airport. The Secretary assured him that this was not a deliberate act. When Lavrov raised the compensation offered (to Aleksandr Kashin) in Vladivostok, the Secretary agreed to discuss the matter at the June consular consultations. Lavrov asserted that the \$100K was insufficient, and the Secretary repeated that the U.S. intends to address the issue.

¶14. (C) Lavrov responded that Russia also would want to discuss the adoption issue in June. There is a Russian law that provides for Russian law to be used to protect Russian citizens abroad that has never been applied. If the U.S. applied it (in the Miles Harrison case), that would go a long way toward gaining support for the U.S. among the Russian population. Lavrov also repeated Russia's interest in a bilateral agreement on adoption.

¶15. (C) Lavrov brought up the matter of two visa applications by Russian citizens that the U.S. had denied. Lavrov said that the two persons who were denied visas have hired American lawyers and intend to try again. Lavrov acknowledged that a country has the right to deny a visa to any person without giving an explanation, but that the American lawyers claim American procedure had been violated in these cases. He said he simply wanted to flag this issue for the Secretary.  
CLINTON